

Mr. Speaker, in closing, the Resilient AMERICA Act does support the communities by investing in premitigation efforts, and these efforts are going to save lives. It is going to save taxpayer dollars by lowering costs of future disasters. It is going to do so many things.

Mr. Speaker, I urge support of this important piece of legislation. I again want to thank the chairman for working with us on this. I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. DEFAZIO. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume to close.

We have just heard very telling testimony from the gentleman from Louisiana (Mr. GRAVES) about the issues with the frequent problems they have had with hurricanes down there, and then the gentleman from California (Mr. LAMALFA) talking about wildfires, which have become more and more intense and widespread and persistent in the West.

On both sides of the aisle, I think almost any Member who has had a disaster, a natural disaster in their district, can attest to the fact that if his or her community had been better prepared, if they had taken steps toward resilience, if the Federal Government had given them that guidance and perhaps some funding incentives to put in place those mitigation measures, that lives would have been saved, property would have been saved, and ultimately the Federal taxpayers would save a lot of money.

This legislation has tremendous merit, and I urge my colleagues to support it unanimously; although, of course, we will have someone on that side of the aisle who will call for a vote even though they might even vote for it. Hopefully, the Senate, in its total dysfunction, will look favorably upon this legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. DEFAZIO) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 5641, as amended.

The question was taken.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. In the opinion of the Chair, two-thirds being in the affirmative, the ayes have it.

Mr. HARRIS. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to section 3(s) of House Resolution 8, the yeas and nays are ordered.

Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, further proceedings on this motion are postponed.

SMALL PROJECT EFFICIENT AND EFFECTIVE DISASTER RECOVERY ACT

Mr. DEFAZIO. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 5641) to amend the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act to increase the

threshold for eligibility for assistance under sections 403, 406, 407, and 502 of such Act, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 5641

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the “Small Project Efficient and Effective Disaster Recovery Act” or the “SPEED Recovery Act”.

SEC. 2. SIMPLIFIED PROCEDURE.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Section 422 of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 5189) is amended—

(1) in subsection (a) by striking “\$35,000” each place it appears and inserting “\$1,000,000”; and

(2) in subsection (b)(3)—

(A) in the heading by inserting “AND REPORT” after “REVIEW”; and

(B) by inserting “and submit to the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure of the House of Representatives and the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs of the Senate a report regarding such review, including any recommendations developed pursuant to such review” after “under this section”.

(b) APPLICABILITY.—The amendments made by subsection (a) shall apply with respect to any amounts appropriated after the date of enactment of this Act.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. DEFAZIO) and the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. GRAVES) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Oregon.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. DEFAZIO. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H.R. 5641, as amended.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Oregon?

There was no objection.

Mr. DEFAZIO. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 5641, the SPEED Recovery Act. This bill will expedite the approval process for FEMA’s small projects within the public assistance program.

The public assistance process is often slow and impeded by bureaucratic red tape, so FEMA offers a simplified approval procedure for small projects that cost \$139,000 or less. When this program was implemented over 40 years ago, it was intended to capture 95 percent of public assistance project worksheets. There has been a little inflation since then.

Today, as we noted earlier, many disasters are more widespread and more expensive. Today only 75 percent of projects are being captured by the \$139,000 threshold. This legislation will ensure that, once again, 95 percent of project worksheets are eligible for expedited review by raising the qualifying project threshold to \$1 million.

By updating the threshold for what qualifies as a small project, barriers to relief and recovery will be alleviated and so will the time it takes communities to get back on their feet post-disaster, and it will allow the limited staff at FEMA to turn their attention to more difficult, expensive, and problematic programs.

Mr. Speaker, I urge all my colleagues to join with me and support this legislation. I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. GRAVES of Missouri. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud to sponsor H.R. 5641, the SPEED Recovery Act. It is a bipartisan bill that cuts red tape and helps expedite disaster recovery efforts, especially in small and rural areas that we have throughout the country.

This legislation updates the threshold of what FEMA considers a small project. It updates it to \$1 million under the Stafford Act; \$1 million under the Stafford Act. This is the first statutory adjustment under the Stafford Act for inflation and rising repair costs in nearly three decades.

Historically, small projects have accounted for about 95 percent of all the recovery projects, but the prolonged failure to increase the cost threshold now means that 25 percent of these projects no longer qualify as small projects. That puts a huge burden on small rural communities that simply don’t have the same kind of resources to deal with the bureaucracy at FEMA. For places like Craig, Missouri, or Brunswick, Missouri, both of which got hammered by the flood of 2019, it has meant more delays and headaches just trying to get the help that they need to recover and to rebuild.

Updating the small project threshold is going to allow these communities to have more control over their disaster recovery efforts and to allow FEMA to focus more of their time and resources on larger and much more complex projects, which represent 90 percent of all disaster costs.

After hearing directly from the communities in my district about the paperwork burdens and the increasing denials over technicalities, my hope is that this commonsense adjustment to the small project threshold is going to improve the process and speed up recoveries for many, many of our communities. We have also received a lot of support for this bill from emergency managers themselves.

Mr. Speaker, I include in the RECORD a joint letter of support from the National Emergency Management Association, the Big City Emergency Managers, and the International Association of Emergency Managers.

IAEM, NEMA, BCEM,
September 10, 2021.

Hon. DINA TITUS, *Chairwoman*,
Hon. DANIEL WEBSTER, *Ranking Member*,
*Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public
Buildings, and Emergency Management*,
*Committee on Transportation and Infra-
structure, House of Representatives, Wash-
ington, DC.*

DEAR CHAIRWOMAN TITUS AND RANKING MEMBER WEBSTER: On behalf of the three associations representing state and local emergency management nationwide, we wish to convey our support for the efforts of Representative Graves of Missouri to introduce the Small Project Efficient and Effective Disaster (SPEED) Recovery Act.

When managing a disaster under the Stafford Act with assistance through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), projects falling below a certain threshold are considered "small." While this threshold is adjusted annually for inflation, the Fiscal Year 2020 level was a mere \$131,000. These small projects require less administrative burden at the local, state, and federal levels which means their approval and execution time is significantly faster than larger projects. The SPEED Recovery Act will raise this threshold to \$1,000,000, thereby significantly increasing the number of projects that can be expedited during the recovery to a disaster.

This type of modernization to disaster response and recovery programs will allow us as emergency managers to more swiftly move projects for disaster survivors and expedite the road toward recovery. As we work individually and with one another to build resilience nationwide, tools such as the SPEED Recovery Act will simplify and streamline FEMA programs when survivors need them most.

We thank Representative Graves for his foresight on this issue and appreciate your leadership in ensuring the SPEED Recovery Act sees action in your subcommittee and throughout the legislative process. Please contact NEMA Deputy Director Matt Cowles, IAEM Director of Government Affairs Thad Huguley or BCEM Executive Director Ron Prater if we can be of further assistance.

Sincerely,

SIMA MERICK,
NEMA President.
JUDSON FREED,
*CEM, IAEM-USA
President.*
MARK SLOAN,
BCEM President.

Mr. GRAVES of Missouri. Mr. Speaker, I urge support of this legislation, and I reserve the balance of my time.

□ 1345

Mr. DEFAZIO. Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as she may consume to the gentlewoman from Nevada (Ms. TITUS), the chair of the subcommittee.

Ms. TITUS. Mr. Speaker, I thank the chairman for yielding time.

The SPEED Recovery Act will expedite the approval process for FEMA's small projects within the Public Assistance Program, or PA program.

I am proud to join Chairman DEFAZIO, Ranking Member GRAVES, and my subcommittee ranking member, Mr. WEBSTER, in bringing this bill forward.

PA helps communities remove debris, implement emergency protective services, and repair damage to public buildings and infrastructure.

The public assistance approval process can be lengthy and complicated,

and that is why, as you have heard, the 1988 Stafford Act ordered FEMA to simplify the procedure for small projects that might not have the capacity or resources to deal with the red tape and complicated grant process.

The cost for completing a small project, however, is not the same as it was in 1988 when this was first established. Stakeholders have reported to Congress, and I heard during a hearing of my subcommittee back in October, that the small projects the program was intended to cover are now unqualified. This legislation will raise the qualifying project threshold, and this updated threshold will speed the postdisaster recovery process and help us to make our communities get back on their feet.

I support this. You heard it; that it is commonsense legislation. I ask my colleagues to do the same, use some common sense and vote to support this.

Mr. GRAVES of Missouri. Mr. Speaker, I yield 4 minutes to the gentlewoman from Puerto Rico (Miss GONZÁLEZ-COLÓN).

Miss GONZÁLEZ-COLÓN. Mr. Speaker, I thank Ranking Member GRAVES for yielding time.

Today, I rise in support of H.R. 5641, the SPEED Recovery Act, which is bipartisan legislation introduced by Ranking Member GRAVES with the support of Chairman DEFAZIO, Chair TITUS, and Ranking Member WEBSTER.

This bill aims toward updating disaster recovery procedures. I can talk about that at length.

During Puerto Rico's recovery from Hurricane Maria, many municipalities on the island faced the situation where, because of the rising costs of materials and labor, relatively simple projects such as a repair to a street or a minor building exceeded the current threshold for what is defined as a small project.

That threshold today is around \$123,000, which really only covers some minor work. This means that a lot of the work for which municipalities may have had the resources to cover their non-Federal share to start and finish promptly instead had to go through the full procedural chain for major projects to qualify for FEMA reimbursement.

Those processes themselves have taken longer than expected. It took almost 4 years in the case of Puerto Rico after the 2017 hurricanes for those municipalities, FEMA, and the Puerto Rico Recovery Office to be able to agree just on the measures to make the processes faster.

That is years in which the people wondered when they were going to see the promised reconstruction. When a community does not see at least small things being taken care of, that weakens our communities and promotes displacement.

Increasing the threshold to \$1 million, including adjustments for inflation, would allow more recovery projects to proceed under simplified procedures, reduce administrative bur-

dens, and provide more certainty for all. This is a major step, and that is the reason I am supporting this bill.

Most disaster claims are on a small, local scale where there is no need to navigate the same procedures over larger, more complex projects and tie up the resources of FEMA and other agencies just looking at those papers. Although FEMA and other agencies have been open to using the administrative flexibility the law provides, in many real-world incidents, that is not enough.

These updates make the Stafford Act language match the realities of construction costs in our States, territories, and communities, which FEMA and the local authorities can then use in order to facilitate approval of the small projects.

Believe me, this is the biggest burden we have in the case of Puerto Rico. Four years after the hurricanes, we are still dealing with this.

Many heads of agencies, Cabinet members, and administrative positions from FEMA and the rest of the Federal agencies still travel to the island to see how they can do this faster, and it is not just red tape. It is amending this kind of language that will provide for those projects to be sped up.

I support this commonsense bipartisan legislation and urge all Members to support it, and I thank the ranking member for doing this.

Mr. DEFAZIO. Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. GRAVES of Missouri. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from California (Mr. LAMALFA).

Mr. LAMALFA. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. GRAVES) for the time.

Here we have again another triumph of legislation coming together that can be beneficial at no great new cost to the process.

The Stafford Act has needed updating, certain aspects, for a long time. When you look at some of the difficulties when you are in a postdisaster situation of having to deal with some arcane legislation and laws, it just makes much more suffering than is necessary for people who have been victims, in my case, from many wildfires in northern California.

In adhering to the approximate 95 percent of projects being under the new threshold, that still keeps with what had been set in place way back in 1988. H.R. 5641 is a triumph in that.

Also, with it at 10 percent of total funding for disasters, we are not blowing the budget on this either.

It is, indeed, very important because when you are talking about my rural district or rural America, you don't have the wherewithal to be hassling your way through some of these processes in order to get things going again postdisaster.

In my area, for example, towns like Whiskeytown, Happy Camp, Hornbrook, Concow, Yankee Hill, Magalia, Paradise, Doyle, Canyon Dam,

Greenville, Indian Falls, and others I couldn't possibly all list here today, they are all going to be beneficiaries and appreciative of this effort because they don't have the ability, small counties like Plumas County and Lassen County, to have to deal with some of the restrictions previously under the Stafford Act.

This would be a big win for anybody facing disaster, a small town, or even large, around this country. This is another win for us legislatively, and I appreciate the effort of the committee.

Mr. DEFAZIO. Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. GRAVES of Missouri. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time.

Mr. Speaker, H.R. 5641, the SPEED Recovery Act, is a commonsense, bipartisan bill that is going to help many small and rural communities respond to and recover from disasters with less delay and much less bureaucracy.

Mr. Speaker, I urge support of this very important piece of legislation. I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. DEFAZIO. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time.

This is a needed adjustment in the cap, very long overdue. It will expedite assistance to individuals, but it also will free up FEMA staff for more meaningful chores and work on ongoing and future disasters, mitigation, recovery, et cetera.

It has tremendous merit, and I urge that all of my colleagues support this legislation.

It will pass by voice vote, and then someone on that side will jump up and call for a recorded vote because that is why they think they are supposed to be here.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. DEFAZIO) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 5641, as amended.

The question was taken.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. In the opinion of the Chair, two-thirds being in the affirmative, the ayes have it.

Mr. HARRIS. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to section 3(s) of House Resolution 8, the yeas and nays are ordered.

Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, further proceedings on this motion are postponed.

UPHOLDING THE FOUNDING DEMOCRATIC PRINCIPLES OF THE NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANIZATION AND ESTABLISHING A CENTER FOR DEMOCRATIC RESILIENCE

Mr. CONNOLLY. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and agree to the resolution (H. Res. 831) calling on the United States Government to uphold the founding democratic principles of

the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and establish a Center for Democratic Resilience within the headquarters of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the resolution.

The text of the resolution is as follows:

H. RES. 831

Whereas the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is the world's preeminent political and military alliance committed to democracy and the collective defense of its members;

Whereas the preamble of NATO's founding North Atlantic Treaty, signed in Washington, DC, on April 4, 1949, declares the alliance is "founded on the principles of democracy, individual liberty, and the rule of law";

Whereas democracies across the alliance face external threats from authoritarian regimes such as Russia and China and internal threats from proponents of illiberalism;

Whereas Russia launched a full-scale invasion of sovereign and democratic Ukraine on February 24, 2022, placing it on the frontlines in the contest between democratic values and autocracy;

Whereas in his address to Congress, President Zelensky remarked "Right now, the destiny of our country is being decided. The destiny of our people, whether Ukrainians will be free, whether they will be able to preserve their democracy.";

Whereas Vladimir Putin's unprovoked full-scale invasion of Ukraine has united the NATO alliance;

Whereas there is a broad agreement within the alliance of the need to strengthen the democracies of NATO members, partners, and aspirant countries;

Whereas, in April 2020, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg appointed an independent Reflection Group tasked with supporting a forward-looking reflection process meant to strengthen the political dimension of the alliance;

Whereas the Reflection Group's report, "NATO 2030: United for a New Era", included analyses and recommendations for the alliance to address "'democratic recession,' the global erosion of democratic norms, and the rise of authoritarianism", including—

(1) "A shared democratic identity is what distinguishes the Alliance from the principal threats and challenges it faces.";

(2) "NATO should reassert its core identity as an Alliance rooted in the principles of democracy.";

(3) "Any commitment to strengthening NATO's political cohesion therefore has to be orientated toward those shared values and ideals, grounded in democracy, rule of law and individual liberty."; and

(4) recommending the establishment of a Center of Excellence for Democratic Resilience in order to strengthen NATO democracies against external threats;

Whereas the Brussels Summit Communiqué issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Brussels on June 14, 2021, stated—

(1) "NATO is the strongest and most successful Alliance in history. It guarantees the security of our territory and our one billion citizens, our freedom, and the values we share, including individual liberty, human rights, democracy, and the rule of law.";

(2) "State and non-state actors challenge the rules-based international order and seek to undermine democracy across the globe."; and

(3) "We reaffirm the Alliance's shared democratic principles as well as our commit-

ment to the spirit and the letter of the North Atlantic Treaty.";

Whereas in Brussels the Allies also committed to updating NATO's Strategic Concept;

Whereas NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg has reiterated that one of the primary purposes of updating the Strategic Concept must be a recommitment to the founding values of the alliance;

Whereas the NATO Parliamentary Assembly supports a new Strategic Concept that reaffirms that the support and strengthening of democratic institutions is foundational to the collective security of Allies;

Whereas Russia's full-scale invasion of sovereign and democratic Ukraine underscores the importance of placing shared democratic values at the heart of NATO's Strategic Concept; and

Whereas the NATO Parliamentary Assembly has endorsed and advanced a proposal to establish a NATO Center for Democratic Resilience within NATO headquarters for the purposes of monitoring and identifying challenges to democracy, human rights, and the rule of law and facilitating democracy and governance assistance to member, partner, and aspirant states, when requested: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the House of Representatives—

(1) reaffirms its unequivocal support for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) as an alliance founded on democratic principles;

(2) urges NATO to continue to provide unwavering support to the people of Ukraine as they fight for their sovereignty, territorial integrity, and a democratic future;

(3) calls on the President to use the voice and vote of the United States to adopt a new Strategic Concept for NATO that is clear about its support for shared democratic values and committed to enhancing NATO's capacity to strengthen democratic institutions within NATO member, partner, and aspirant countries; and

(4) calls on the President to use the voice and vote of the United States to establish a Center for Democratic Resilience within NATO headquarters.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. CONNOLLY) and the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. TURNER) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Virginia.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. CONNOLLY. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H. Res. 831, as amended.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Virginia?

There was no objection.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I thank Chairman GREG MEEKS and Ranking Member MIKE MCCAUL for helping bring this bipartisan resolution to the floor today.

I also want to thank my partner in so much of this enterprise with respect to NATO and the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. TURNER).

H. Res. 831, which we introduced together, Mr. TURNER and I, calls on the